

## Speech of the James M'Dowell, jr. (of Rockbridge), in the House of delegates of Virginia, on the slave question

OF JAMES M'DOWELL, JR. (OF ROCKBRIDGE,) IN THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES OF VIRGINIA, ON THE SLAVE QUESTION: *Delivered Saturday, January 21, 1832.*

SECOND EDITION.

This second edition of the speech of James M'Dowell, Jr. on the "Slave Question," is published by gentlemen who are favorable to the views advocate by Mr. M'D.

RICHMOND: Printed by Thomas W. White, opposite the Bell Tavern.

1832.

E445 .V8 M13

### **SPEECH.**

*Mr. Speaker:* There are many circumstances connected with the protraction of the present debate, which make it, personally, undesirable for me to enter upon it now. The various bearings of which it is susceptible have been explored; the principles on which the decision of it should finally rest, have been stated and examined; the stores of argument and of fancy have alike been drawn upon to sustain and relieve it—the whole ground repeatedly, ably and successfully pre-occupied. In this situation, silence, especially by one whose habits commend it to his observance, and whose legislative duties have entirely detached him from the immediate subject of debate, (a debate, too, *unexpectedly* introduced,) can only be broken with positive disadvantage. And, sir, I would not break it now; I would not open the lips which discretion should seal, were it not that the question

## Library of Congress

which we are discussing, and the discussion itself, have brought a crisis on the country; have brought up a measure for decision here, of such eventful influence over the social structure and condition of the State, as to demand, imperatively demand of every member that, guided only by his judgement and his conscience, he should stand forth, firmly and deliberately, and take his position upon it. In doing this, I desire that my reasons may accompany my act. Sir, if there ever was a subject thrown before the public councils of any people, which involved a crisis in their affairs, that subject is before us now, view it in what aspect you can and decide it as you may. It is one whose consequences go more to the peace and power of this Commonwealth; to that of the whole slave-holding portion of our Union—possibly to that of the Union itself—one which will awaken throughout the Continent of America a deeper response of sympathetic feeling, and will comprehend in its final results, a wider range of operation upon intellectual and moral and christian man, than any to which the Legislature of Virginia has ever been directed. Cast your eye for a single instant over that volume of consequences to our own and to the millions of another race, whose destinies are complicated with ours in this measure—cast your eye to these as they lie folded up in the proposition on your table—and you will at once perceive that it is not in the power of rhetorical extravagance to give to that proposition any factitious weight; that it is not more than competent for language itself, enervated as its strong terms have become by familiar use, adequately to impress a suitable conception of its character. We, sir, to whom it is given to *originate* and dispose of the measure from which these consequences will flow, to be the actors in this new scene of legislation, will stand out in the foreground of our country's history—prominent on its canvass—the subjects of curious interest and of various animadversion, to the statesmen and the philanthropists of after-time. Thus elevated by the circumstances in which we are casually placed, to a peculiar association with the future fate of the Commonwealth, I, for one, am deeply sensible, both to the responsibility and the distinction of the posture; deeply sensible to the anxious call which Virginia makes, in this trying hour of her fortunes, upon the calmest wisdom of her public men; and am gratified—nay, am proud, that as one, and an humble one, of these, it is permitted me to respond to that call, by uniting with others in the indication and

## Library of Congress

support of a policy which, however startling at the first sight, is the only one in which a sure guarantee can be found for the great interests of the State, or for the permanent security and happiness of the citizen. This policy, which has long been repressed by unmanly apprehensions or smothered as the dream of impracticable benevolence; discoursed of by the statesman only in his closet; and breathed by the christian only in a silent prayer for his country:—this policy, I thank Heaven, can, at last, be debated in the face of day—in the face of assembled multitudes—can be brought for judgement to the bar of reason, and searched and decided by the lights of truth.

Adverting to the course of debate, that I might collect from it the prominent points on which it has been conducted, and as far as practicable, examine them myself, I regret that any one of them has been lost to me—regret especially, that I was casually prevented from bearing the remarks of the gentleman from Petersburg, (Mr. Brown,) as well because they have been represented as exhibiting a favorable specimen of intellectual power, as because of their assuming some new grounds of argument. Not having heard them, however, and no report of them yet existing for reference, they are inaccessible to me for any purpose, either of criticism or conviction. So far as the debate has come within my knowledge, no direct inquiry has been made into the relative capacities of the negro and the white man, as *laborers*—as the mere agents of production. This inquiry seems to have been estopped by the general, I believe, universal concession, that slavery was an “evil.” Thus, sir, a branch, necessary to the full investigation of the subject, and one upon which the expediency of a gradual emancipation can well be supported, has been indirectly closed. I say well supported, because no proposition can be more easily or conclusively established, both by general deduction from the principles of human nature, and by observed facts, than *this*, that the labor of a free white man, in the temperate latitude of Virginia, is more productive than that of a slave—yielding a larger aggregate for public and for private wealth.

But it is not in this relation, not as a laborer of equal or of less capability than the white man, that the negro has been considered; he has been considered chiefly as an *alien*

## Library of Congress

*element* in the composition of our civil society, as constituting a class which cannot be otherwise than perpetually distinct—necessarily discordant with that which governs him—between whom a common sympathy is impossible, and whose existing rights admit of no melioration. It is under this view of the negro's situation here, that the case of gradual emancipation has been argued—that the question has been put and controverted, whether upon a comprehensive estimate of our permanent interests, it is most expedient to retain him as a slave, or to liberate and remove him? Whilst, however, it is admitted, that slavery is a hostile principle in any society and government, especially in one like ours, and therefore, an “evil,” it is nevertheless maintained to be an evil so interwoven with the habits and rights of our people as to be incorrigible by any means consistent with these, and at the same time, within our reach; and upon this double view of the case, the efficacy, as well as propriety, of legislation upon it, is challenged.

Your committee, sir, declare that legislation “*at present is inexpedient:*” The amendment proposed, and now under discussion, declares the contrary. Believing that the amendment takes the true ground, I shall endeavor to sustain it: and in so doing, will present the considerations which I have to submit without reference to method, and without limiting myself to the only point which is strictly before us, that of expediency, I will, under the sanction of the general example, look a little to the *mode* of legislation also, and see whether there be any principle on which it may be justly and rightfully exercised.

Whatever it may have been, it is no part of our legislative duty, at this day to inquire, whether slavery does or does not consist with the first and leading principle of a Republic; nor is it necessary to determine whether the permission of it here does not form one of the most striking instances upon record, of a people resolutely violating towards others, that principle of absolute freedom on which they erected their own independence, and which they were the first to proclaim to the world as the only just and admissible rule of popular government. Forbearing inquiry into the coherence of slavery with the abstract *principles* of our government, I shall not make the question of its coherence with the abstract principles of morality, and will not, as some gentlemen have done, consider the position, whether,

## Library of Congress

morally, we have any warrant for it or not. Upon this point angry controversies have long been maintained. The absence from the Bible, of any direct reprobation of the practice of slavery, the qualified admission of it, under the Mosaic Law—the double reference which is made to it in the Decalogue itself, the recognition of it by St. Paul in a specific case, (the case of Onesimus,) and the identity of the words, servant and slave, in the etymologies of the Greek language, the original language of the Testament, are all of them so many points of argument on one side, rebutted on the other, and powerfully rebutted by the fact of man's original equality of rights, equality of responsibility as a moral agent, and by the great canon of the divine law, which enjoins upon all to perform to others the duties which we exact for ourselves.

But, sir, whether the slave, as the descendant of Ham, suffers under a primitive curse—whether he is graduated in his intellect, by Providence, for the post which he actually occupies in the labors of the world—or whether he belongs to another family of nations, the family of Cush, and has sprung from ancestors illustrious in history, the reformers of Ancient Egypt, the authors of arts and learning—nay of the very alphabet itself—whichever of these suppositions be the true one, and curious and instructive as may be the learning by which they are respectively maintained, they may yet be decided either way without in the least affecting him as he is known to our laws—in the least affecting him as the proposed object of practical legislation. It is only as such an object, and not because of any speculative matter connected with his history, or with our right to his services as a slave, that I intend to regard him now.

The impracticability of legislating in any useful manner, for the ultimate emancipation and removal of the slaves of this Commonwealth, has been assumed in the course of debate by many gentlemen, and all attempts having that object in view, have, in consequence, been denounced by them as not only unwise, but improper and dangerous. This assumption is a violent one. With thousands of examples around us of what it is possible for the human mind to accomplish when it is exerted upon other objects of interest or pursuit, we have no reason to presuppose a failure to its exertions in the case before us.

## Library of Congress

If it is a case of much difficulty, it is also one of more than correspondent importance—one which must, of *necessity*, be reflected on, which must engross the energies of the public mind as it engrosses to the last degree, the public security and repose. The difficulties in the way of legislation are not more positive than are the necessities for it; they go hand in hand, increasing with every hour of delay: and that these difficulties are not removable by some scheme easily prepared, and to which, when it is prepared exception cannot be taken, is no more than what is true of every other complicated subject, and constitutes a reason, not for abandonment, but for a more painstaking perseverance. Of all others, the objection to this measure, that it is difficult—the assumption that it is impracticable, is made with the worst grace by us who have just entered upon the threshold of its investigation; by us, who are employed for no other end than that of adjusting these very difficulties as they arise in the public business, and who have received the whole constitutional power of the State in the express confidence that, devoting our time and talents exclusively to the trust, we would apply it to this or any other purpose which the situation of the community might require. Had the difficulty of an enterprise been made a rule for avoiding or deserting it, in the ordinary undertakings of life, as gentlemen would have it to be in that which is proposed for the public, we should have been enriched by none of the acquisitions of science or art, and society, at this day, would have had little to distinguish it from that of a primitive and barbarous age.

Allow me, sir, in this connexion, to refer to a declaration of an illustrious man of another country. It was once asked of Sir Isaac Newton, by an admirer who was confounded at the splendid results of his science, how it was possible for him to have reduced all the phenomena of the Heavens to a few elementary and easily intelligible principles of calculation? “I never could have done it,” was the reply, “otherwise than by *long, laborious, and patient thought*.” This reply is admonitory to us, and we may profit of it in our present speculations. We have a problem, a practical problem, to discuss and to settle which demands this process of thought beyond every other one on which the mind can be employed, which takes continents and ages into its scope of operation, and

## Library of Congress

which, thereby, involves an influence on the sum of human happiness so immeasurably greater than any with which the results of speculative science could affect it, that all the problems of all the schoolmen and philosophers seem, in comparison of this, to be little more than the day-dreams of a profitless and visionary abstraction. Let us but give our minds patiently and laboriously to some plan of gradual emancipation and removal, and we need not fear the result—need not fear but that some one will be devised which shall be just in its principle, and, for the most, satisfactory in its details. Several have already been presented—characterized, indeed, by features of more or less imperfection, but, nevertheless, in refutation of the idea that any one was impracticable and principally repugnant to those who, believing that all schemes are improper, can the more easily imagine that all are defective. Enough has been prepared to show that the subject is practicable: enough has not, and never will be prepared to satisfy predetermined hostility.

The example of our ancestors, in this matter, has been plead against legislative action on it now. They, and they only, it has been said, were competent to undertake and perfect the proposed experiment on our slave population. The case of emancipation, if ever manageable, was manageable by them; the difficulties which now oppress it were less embarrassing then, and yet they were deemed to be too overpowering to be grappled with. Hence it is argued, that the case having changed for the worse, the imprudence of legislating upon it has become greater, and that what, in this respect, was merely unwise for our ancestors to attempt, would be madness for us. Now, sir, besides the double error, both in argument and in morals, of claiming a faulty example for imitation—a slight examination into the early circumstances of slavery in this Commonwealth, will shew, that the change in these, which has since taken place, and upon which all legislation is now denounced, is precisely the change which justifies and requires it. With a far smaller number of negroes than we have, if it was more easy for our forefathers to emancipate and deport them, it was less necessary: no motive but that of moral duty demanded it; personal safety was not implicated in the question; the general considerations of expediency which now operate, were unfelt, and the fact that the negro was then more

## Library of Congress

valuable as a property, and less dangerous as a man, was an additional persuasive for contentment with the policy that enslaved him. That schemes for his emancipation were therefore discouraged, is no more than should have been expected: that they should have been formed and pressed as an offering of voluntary justice, uncalled for by private interest or public necessity, would have been more extraordinary and much more at war with the principles of our nature!

At that day, the sentiment of the world generally was less adverse to this institution of slavery than it is at present, and the sentiment of our own country admitted towards persons, of a much greater restriction upon the principle of absolute equality than it does now. At that time too, our agricultural wants sent us in quest of laborers for the field—our forests were to be levelled—our low-lands to be fitted for culture, and the staple which for many a year brought wealth to the planter and afforded perhaps the original pretext for the importation of the slave, was nearly or quite limited to the production of our own soil. Hence the labor of the slave was more necessary and more profitable. Then also an immense territory was open to his admittance and an unrestrained exportation supplied the ready means of disposal for all which the convenience or interests of our citizens might require to be sold. Now, this outlet for the vicious or redundant portion of this people is closed—the forests which burdened the labors of our ancestors have disappeared, and the peculiar staple which rewarded them has been scattered far and near through the Union.

From this it results, that the slave now lives amongst us when he is less wanted—less profitable—less tolerated by public feeling, and when his accumulation, which was never influenced by moral restraint, is no longer repressed by that positive check which a foreign and an open market had afforded. Our present relation to the slave, therefore, is widely different from what it has been, and the several particulars in which this difference consists are several arguments for making him the subject of immediate legislation. He might, or he might not, have been made such by our ancestors, in some degree, at their discretion: no motive of private interest imperatively urged them to the step, and although a sound

## Library of Congress

policy which looked to future results would then, as now, have made it wise, yet there was no necessity like the present, which superseded all choice and made it indispensable.

Were the example of the period adverted to, or of any period to be preferred to the decisions of our own reason in the discharge of our own duties—were it a just rule of action that those who control the public welfare of one age should yield a prescriptive obedience to the policy of the age that went before it, then it were but a small consolation to know that the circumstances under which this sacrifice of moral and mental independence is required, are the same with those upon which that policy was originally established. Here, however, this is not the case; and the example invoked for imitation, is an example misapplied.

But if it were otherwise—if the past and present circumstances which qualify the propriety of legislating on the subject in issue, were essentially the same, the example proposed for adoption, should be rejected—it is unworthy of acknowledgement—unworthy of obedience—an example of error, and it is no part of the better spirit of the day in which we live, to canonize error, because of its antiquity—no part of that spirit, to permit the sentiment of veneration for the dead, which softens the worst of their acts, and which sheds a salutary and healing influence upon individual feeling, to hallow a ruinous example to national observance. Sir, if our ancestors had exerted the firmness which, under higher obligations, we ourselves, are called upon to exert, Virginia would not, at this day, have been mourning over the legacy of weakness, and of sorrow, that has been left her—she would not have been thrust down—down—in a still lowering relation, to the subordinate post which she occupies in the confederacy whose career she had led—she would not be withering under the leprosy which is piercing her to the heart.

Who will say that this Commonwealth is what she would have been without this alien population in her bosom, that her people are as happy, her power as great, her geographical divisions as perfectly united by community of interest, as perfectly knit together by the tastes and habits and pursuits—by the assimilation of character and object

## Library of Congress

which identify and attach a homogeneous people? Who will say that Virginia has risen to the lofty prosperity of which she is capable; that her physical condition conforms to her physical resources, that her multiplied bounties of land and of water, have ministered as they should have done, to the comforts of her people, that a thrifty agriculture is every where extracting wealth from her soil and an active commerce gathering it from her streams, that a spirit of hardy and forward enterprise directs alike the energies of the public and the private arm, pervades the land with its living impulse, covers it with the achievements of labor, the improvements of skill, the ameliorated means of personal and business connexion—with the varied traces of its invigorating and salutary power—that the Commonwealth, under a double developement of its moral and physical faculties, blends, at a single exhibition, all that it is possible for a prosperous people with a free government to accomplish? Who will say this? Sir, no one will say it. Our proverbial admiration of Virginia and the prodigal eulogy which that admiration inspires, cannot tempt us to such extravagance as this.

We know that the picture is the “counterfeit presentment” of the true one. We know that inefficiency and languor characterize our movements—that enterprise is scarcely known to us, but from observation of its influence on other communities. We know that the blessings of our position and soil and climate are countervailed by the apathy of our public counsels and by our exclusive reliance upon involuntary labor. Our interests and senses, proclaim the progress of general decline; conscience and experience attest that slavery is its principal cause. Is it not so? When we look at Virginia as a whole, without pausing upon the bright and the beautiful that still show forth as intrinsic qualities *of her character*, but look at her, in reference to her every day practical habit and appearance, is she not any thing but prosperous? Do we not in this respect contemplate her justly when we regard her as meagre, haggard and enfeebled—with decrepitude stealing upon her limbs—as given over to leanness and impotency, and as wasting away under the improvidence and the inactivity which eternally accompany the fatal institution that she cherishes and cherishes, too, as a mother who will hazard her own life rather than part even with the

## Library of Congress

monstrous offspring that afflicts her? Sir, it is true of Virginia, not merely that she has not advanced but that in many respects she has greatly declined; and what have we got as a compensation for this decline? As a compensation for this disparity between what Virginia is and what she might have been? Nothing but the right of property in the very beings who have brought this disparity upon us. This is our pay; this is what we have gotten to remunerate us for our delinquent prosperity; to repay us for our desolated fields, our torpid enterprise; and in this dark day of our humbled importance, to sustain our hopes and to soothe our pride as a people.

I ask you, sir, is the consideration satisfactory, the equivalent complete? Is a birthright of citizenship in a free community, unaccompanied by this right of property, less valuable or less dear than one in 2 10 our community as it now is, where this right is retained, but where the retention of it has paralyzed the energies of the State and planted at every hearth the instrument of domestic massacre? Who, sir, that looks at this property as a legislator and marks its effect on our national advance but weeps over it as the worst of patrimonies? Who that looks to this unhappy bondage of an unhappy people in the midst of our society and thinks of its incidents or its issues but weeps over it as a curse upon him who inflicts as upon him who suffers it? Who that would place Virginia without a slave upon her surface in any comparison of equality with Virginia and the thousands who have yielded their liberty to her laws?

If I am to judge from the tone of our debate, from the concessions on all hands expressed, there is not a man in this body, not one, perhaps, that is even represented here, who would not have thanked the generations that have gone before us if, acting as *public* men, they had brought this bondage to a close—who would not have thanked them, if, acting as private men on private motives, they had relinquished the property which their mistaken kindness has devolved upon us? Proud as are the names for intellect and patriotism which enrich the volumes of our history and reverentially as we turn to them at this period of waning reputation, that name—that man—above all parallel would have been the chief, who could have blotted out this curse from his country—those, above all

## Library of Congress

others, would have received the homage of an eternal gratitude, who casting away every suggestion of petty interest, had broken the yoke which, in evil hour, had been imposed and had translated, as a *free man*, to another continent, the outcast and the wretched being who burdens ours with his presence and who defiles it with his crimes.

But, sir, it has been otherwise appointed. Slavery has come down to us from our fathers, and the question now is, shall we, in turn, hand it over to our children? Hand it over to them aggravated in every attribute of evil? Shall we perpetuate the calamity we deplore and become to posterity the objects, not of kindness but of cursing? Possessed of slaves as a private property by the act of our ancestors, shall we transmit it as such throughout an indefinite future? This is the question.

It is answered that we *shall* transmit it; that the right to the slave is indefeasible and unpurchasable; that we have no power to divest it and no means to buy it up with. Time, it is urged, operates no change whatever in the *right*; that cleaves to the descendants of the slave whenever existing, and though a century may interpose its succession of descents, yet it remains unweakened and abides upon the offspring then no less than upon the parent now. The right, then it seems, is interminable. But where are the public resources with which to purchase out this right? Are there none? So the Treasury answers.—Can none be raised? This too, may perhaps be answered in the negative. It may be argued, and with some show of force, that you cannot tax a negro in order to accumulate a sum wherewith you may ultimately buy him, because the tax itself is an abstraction from his value and you have the same right to take the whole of his value as a part. You cannot tax land exclusively for such an object, because 11 that would be to make one property pay for another—to sacrifice one class of private rights equally sacred, to another class. There is, therefore, a total want of means, present and prospective.

Allusion, however, both frequent and confident, has been made to those of the general government, as being open to our hand. I will suppose them equally intangible for any purpose connected with our subject. What then sir? With a right of property perpetual in

## Library of Congress

the hands of the citizen, and without resources in those of the public to extinguish it by purchase, what is to be done—what *can* be done? Is the private right to be perpetuated at all hazards to the State? Has the State, as such, no rights which conflict with this perpetuity? No power to regulate a property, which *exists only in virtue of her own laws*? No reason to make the regulation when that property which is only sanctioned as *incidental* to the public good, is like to endanger its subversion? Is not the State a party, representing the general interests of all with which no specific, individual interests can be permitted, either hypothetically or practically, to be repugnant? Is she competent to institute a right of property which she is not competent to remedy, qualify or withdraw as considerations of necessity or of paramount interest may require? Must she look, sir, in quiet imbecility, on the multiplying evils of her slave population—must she sit down in powerless despair, and see this population coming on—wave after wave—a gathering deluge to overwhelm her?

No, sir, she has the corrective power which she may justly apply when her judgement directs, and apply in such event, without violence to private rights, which, so far as they are conventional, do not and cannot exist, but in dependence upon the higher rights of the State.—All States resting upon compacts, express or implied, for the public good, no one has the capacity even to *will*, much less to authorize, an injury to the well-being, which, and which only, it was constituted to protect. The private property, therefore, which a State allows to be held by its citizens, must consist with the general end for which the State itself is created; must be held under the reserved and necessary condition that it is not to be productive of public disadvantage, or, that if it be, that then it becomes the fair subject, to the State, of resumption or restraint. Any other tenure to private property than this—a tenure by which it might be held over after a discovery of its pernicious or dangerous influence to the public welfare, would be incompatible with the very object for which it is authorized and with that just relation of inferiority of individual interests to the interests of the State.

## Library of Congress

The power, therefore, Mr. Speaker, of correcting the evil tendencies of an authorized property, is inherent in all governments, and the exercise of that power in effecting the correction, when such tendencies arise, is no infringement of private rights—no infringement, because, as these exist within the limitation that they do not conflict with the general weal, they may be considered as determined when that conflict occurs. A State cannot arbitrarily cancel a private property when its uses are salutary without committing injustice to private rights: an individual cannot hold a property when its general qualities are dangerous or baneful without doing equal injustice to the 12 rights which are public. Both have rights in this subject of property then which, at certain limits, mutually exclude interference. But, sir, whilst it is unquestionably true as a general principle that the right to private property is a grant from the public which it may or it may not make at its pleasure and which, when made, does not detract in the smallest degree from the power of that public to recall it if it be a grant of evil operation—whilst this principle is true and admitted, an embarrassing difficulty will generally arise in reducing it to practice.—How, when, and under what circumstances shall it be applied? At what degree of ill operation is a private property justly restrainable by the State?

Let us see, sir, whether that which we are considering, has acquired a character and an operation which places it within this degree and properly subjects it to correction. And in this investigation there is no difficulty—nothing has been left to speculation or inquiry, for however widely gentlemen have differed upon the power and the justice of touching this property, they have yet united in a common testimony to its character. It has been frankly and unequivocally declared from the very commencement of this debate by the most decided enemies of abolition themselves as well as by others—that this property is an “evil”—that it is a dangerous property. Yes, sir, so dangerous has it been represented to be even by those who desire to retain it, that we have been reproached for speaking of it otherwise than in fireside whispers—reproached for entertaining debate upon it in this Hall, and the discussion of it with open doors and to the general ear, has been charged upon us as a climax of rashness and folly which threatens issues of calamity to the country. It

## Library of Congress

is then a dangerous property—held at the certain and declared risk of involving, from any act of imprudence in us or its owners, the repose and security of our people. What follows from this character? That the property which bears it is beyond the reach of interference or restraint from the laws? Assuredly not.

With the principle undenied and undeniable that it is the right and the duty of every government to protect its citizens from danger, no matter what be the form of it—a right and duty which necessarily result from the very purposes of a political compact and independently of any direct stipulation to that effect—with this principle admitted in the government, and with a property amongst us, the danger of which is also admitted, does not the case already exist to which the principle should be applied? Why this power of protection unless it is to be applied when danger occurs? Danger is the very thing to which this power is the necessary and intended antagonist—the very thing to which it is perpetually opposed—from the first moment of its existence to any after period of its progress, this power is always ready to meet and resist it. At no time therefore can the existence of danger and the duty of protection, subsist side by side in quiet fellowship with each other.

But it is thought that this protective power is altogether ulterior in its nature and objects, and cannot be properly resorted to but when the greatness of danger to the whole State requires the suspension of her ordinary laws; that it is in fact, a power which never arises except 13 when the life of a community is at stake and when a consequential right is derived, from that circumstance, of doing whatever the public exigency may demand. Now, sir, the idea that we cannot remedy an evil existing in the form of a private right and sanctioned by the civil law without waiting until it becomes formidable enough to threaten the very being of the State, and thus to justify a resort to the supreme “law of necessity,” is a mistaken and a mischievous one. It is an idea evidently founded upon the supposed analogy between the case of a State exposed to peril from external or from organized violence, and assuming, in consequence, the shield of the “supreme law” for its defence, and the case of a State when the danger to which it is exposed proceeds from the ill-

## Library of Congress

regulation or the ill-character of one or more of its private and domestic rights. No such analogy obtains. When the violence is offered to a State which requires an appeal to this “supreme law” for protection, the danger is immediate—uncompromising—total;—not arising *out* of the laws, but directed *against* them; comprehending all the rights of all the citizens, and demanding such suspension of them all as may be necessary for their ultimate safety—demanding a remedy prompt as the danger and co-extensive with the injury which it threatens. In the case, however, of a similar danger being likely to result to a State, from the ill-management or from the progressive extension of an injurious property, it is one which must, at first, be limited—must be of gradual advance—of slow growth—and therefore not one which necessarily subjects the State to the exercise of any extraordinary means to repel it. On the contrary it is a danger which is fairly within the reach and correction of the ordinary laws, out of whose provisions it proceeds, and whose beneficial objects in establishing property must be abused before it can even begin to exist.

That there is a power to be exercised, at *some time* or other, when the safety of the State requires it, and against whatsoever may be repugnant to that safety, nobody questions. The difficulty seems to be in fixing upon the proper time and the proper degree of public jeopardy, at which such an exercise of power is allowable. It is a difficulty, which in my judgement, can be resolved into the single proposition—whether it is wiser to exercise that power when danger is first discovered, is feeblest and most manageable, or when it has acquired extent and strength and manifold means of strenuous resistance? Between such alternatives one would suppose that there could be no hesitation, and they are, unquestionably, the very alternatives which a just consideration of this admitted power presents. Is it, sir, a merely military power belonging to the armory, indeed, of every government but never to be drawn out for service except as a piece of ordnance is drawn out, when the “*ultima ratio*” is appealed to? Never to be exerted but in the battle field and when the State necessities are such as to put her upon a struggle of strength? Is it to be exerted only when it can be best opposed, and when successful opposition would be the

## Library of Congress

most ruinous? Certainly no. This would be to hazard the very power itself on the efficiency of which the public security depends: this would be to limit it when applied to a cause of domestic danger, in a far greater measure than it is confessedly limited when applied 14 between nations themselves to maintain and defend their separate independence.

It is, sir, as we all know, an undoubted principle of national law that any nation has the right of interposing and crushing, if she can, the hostile preparations which are making by another, and which she has just and sufficient reason to believe are intended for herself. This is the principle of defence; and if actual hostilities committed by one nation upon another in order to obviate an apprehended injury be a legitimate and sanctioned application of it, then is the repression, by any country, of any existing cause of internal danger or disorder, *a fortiori*, a more legitimate exercise of the principle still. It is easier to defend by excluding or preventing danger than by permitting and then resisting it. It involves less sacrifice, less suffering; and hence the propriety of this principle or right of national interference. Upon this ground also—that of preventing injury by anticipating its occurrence—are founded the civil enactments which relate to personal security. Did the law afford no such provision as this for the safety of our persons, no other could be effectual. In such cases a *remedy* for the satisfaction of a permitted injury would be the merest mockery of protection. The injury which might have been restrained, if allowed to be perpetrated, might be such, that no human remedy could reach it—such that no degree or accumulation of pain upon the offender would be productive of any mitigation to his act. The idea of personal security from a law which is not preventive in its operation is wholly delusive—a fallacy on which no man would rely, as no man would be safe who could never look to his government but in the moment of assault—could never call upon it for help, but when the dagger was plying at his bosom.

Sir, this defensive power of the government is not passive as gentlemen would make it—is not held up for occasional exertion—for emergencies of State which may call it into use, but to become the real and beneficent safeguard which it is qualified and intended to be,

## Library of Congress

it must be habitually directed to the prevention of every danger, wherever and whenever it appears, which can threaten the general security.

Am I asked how this protective power is to be applied to the case before us—the case of slavery? Unquestionably, I answer, in no other way than by a decisive and timely prevention of its dangers.—But what, it is further asked, is the mode of prevention? I answer as frankly, that there *can* be no other mode than that of keeping down or diminishing the increase of the slaves by a gradual liberation and removal of them. I would not apply this mode, except at the private election of the owners, to the slaves *now in existence, but only to those hereafter born*. These, and these only, should be made the objects of positive law. If the holders of these decline a voluntary surrender of their claim to them, then, in the first place, this claim should be purchased out by the State, but if the State have not the means of making the purchase, then this claim should be forfeited to the State in such manner as shall best preserve the interests of individuals without hazarding too much the interests and safety of the Commonwealth.

But, sir, here is the tender point: here it is that we have been called upon to stop, to desist, to touch not, to handle not—that the 15 property we would remove—the property we would purchase—the property we would forfeit, both the born and unborn, is private property, and perfectly sacred in that character, from the action of every power but the power of arbitrary and lawless force. Is this eternity to the private right to be admitted?

Admit that this right of private property in the slave is perpetual and indefeasible, and how stands the question of relative rights between the government and its citizens? On the one side the sanctity and inviolability of private property is plead for the preservation of the total number of our slaves, present and to come: on the other side, there is plead, the increasing danger of this slave population to the public security, and the consequent necessity of arresting it by a gradual reduction of its numbers. Allow the private claim of property to prevail, and you authorize a progressive and indefinite increase of the slave:—Allow the public claim to security to prevail, and you authorize an immediate restriction

## Library of Congress

of that increase. How, sir, are these opposite claims, both of them of acknowledged legitimacy—the one as resulting from the operation of law, the other as resulting from the very purpose of government—how are they to be reconciled with each other in their practical effects? If a limitation is imposed on the right to this property or its increase, an abridgment of private rights is complained of: if no limitation is imposed, an abridgment of personal and public security is complained of. Upon this opposition how are we to decide? How can we decide but against the inferior right?

The rights of private property and of personal security exist under every government, but they are not *equal*. Security is the primary purpose for which men enter into government; property, beyond a sufficiency for natural wants, is only a secondary purpose. It is because private property ministers to the uses and comforts and enjoyments of persons that it is sanctioned by law, and it is for these ends and these only that it is sanctioned. To these ends, therefore, must it be kept constantly subordinate, constantly conformed. When it loses its utility—when it no longer contributes to the personal benefits and wants of its holder in any equal degree with the expense or the risk or the danger of keeping it—much more—when it jeopardizes the security of the public—when this is the case, then the original purpose for which it is authorized is lost; its character of property, in the just and beneficial sense of it, is gone, and it may be regulated, without private injustice, in any manner which the general good of the community, by whose laws it was licensed, may require.

The contrary of this doctrine is monstrous: it would be to make man with all his rights of life and liberty and happiness, subordinate to the workmanship of his own hands—to the very commodity, the very property by which he intended to aid and accommodate his person. No government will do this—no government can do it. Constituted to protect property *only* as it answers the *uses of persons*, a government cannot protect it to the extent of bringing those persons into danger. But, sir, the danger from an unchecked accumulation of our slaves is, on all bands, acknowledged. Then may that danger, and in the very way in which it arises, be justly prevented. There is no sacredness in this property which is equal to the sacredness of personal security—no right in it which must not yield when its

## Library of Congress

continuance would subject that security to hazard. The tenure of it is for good—not for evil—for the general benefit of society, not for its endangering or its calamity.

No one disguises the danger of this property—that it is inevitable or that it is increasing. How then is the government to avert it? By a precautionary and preventive legislation or by permitting it to “grow with our growth” until it becomes intolerable and then correcting it by the sword? In the one way or the other, by the peaceful process of legislation or the bloody one of the bayonet, our personal and public security must be maintained against the dangers of this property: either the right to acquire or retain it must be qualified by some limitation of time or service which shall have the effect of diminishing its increase or all restraints upon it must be abandoned and the country be made to depend upon the final remedy of force. An unlimited right to the purchase and the possession of the slave cannot but favor the progress of his numbers to an aggregate so formidable as may place the safety of the Commonwealth in his actual and violent extirpation. The claim to property cannot balance, much less, cancel the claim to security; and when the two come into collision, as come they must if things continue as they are, then the property must yield and the claim to security must be satisfied should it require the immediate and total abolition of its adversary.

Let it not be said that this is the extreme case—the very one to which the law of necessity applies—the very one, which is admitted to sanction, if circumstances require it, the suppression of property rights. Why await the sure arrival of that day when these rights may have to be annulled without any reservation whatever? Why not anticipate it by a suitable regulation of them and thereby save them, if they are so highly valued, from destruction?

Sir, this “*supreme law*” of the public safety which is thought to arise only when a State is in actual jeopardy of life and limb and which is then so plenary for all the purposes of defence—this law is best understood when it is believed to possess preventive as well as remedial agencies. It is thus understood and applied, as already stated, between nations

## Library of Congress

—it would be no less correctly understood and applied in all cases of domestic policy. There exists no just reason why this law is not as obligatory upon government, not as supreme over all who are charged with its administration, to provide against any foreseen and probable event which will put the public safety to hazard as it is to provide for the restoration of that safety when the hazard shall have been in .

It would be easy to enlarge upon this point, but I trust that enough has been said to sustain the principle assumed, that it is the right and duty of every community to qualify, limit and prescribe the terms on which property shall be held by its citizens, and, therefore, the duty of the citizen to submit his property, at all times, to this reserved right of control in his government. Were this principle a false one, and the opposite of it true, then it would follow, that whenever a property is once introduced into a community—if introduced through a 17 consent casually given or through ignorance of its qualities or through the suggestions of temporary convenience or *ex necessitate*, as is known to have been the case with our slave property—if introduced, no matter how, and no matter what be its character, it is forever after intangible—not subject to restraint—not subject to removal but a vested private right, and therefore too sacred to be touched. Call it but a private property, and be it ever so evil, you endow it, according to this principle, with a perpetual impunity. Let it be gifted with nothing but mischief, noxious as the imagination can paint it, the very “moth and rust” which corrupteth and endangerth society, if it be once allowed as a property, you cannot recall it—you cannot mitigate it; restraint upon it would be profanation—control would be tyranny—you must permit it and cherish it as if it were a blessing—you must endure it in despite of its evil, despite of its terrors—you cannot, you dare not interpose till your existence is at stake—till fear and danger have left you no choice but a choice between the extinction of the property or the extinction of the State. Maintain the inviolability of property without reference to its uses or its effects and this is the monstrous result. If it happens to be a dangerous one, violence and force are the only remedies which are allowed.

## Library of Congress

Surely no man can adopt the principle, which, fairly applied and extended, leads to this result—and yet this is the principle, contended for. Under this principle slavery is held to be extinguishable but no otherwise than by insurrection and blood; under that, which I have attempted to support, it is held to be extinguishable also, but by gradual legislation, which, operating on its future increase, shall qualify and limit it according to the demands of public safety.—The slave—considered as a person multiplying more rapidly than his owner and soon destined to outstrip him in number—is a dangerous property, and if the “*salus populi*,” the “supreme law of public safety,” be correctly understood as comprehending a power to provide against a danger to the public security from an anticipated occurrence *equally* with a power to preserve that security when the occurrence foreseen has actually transpired (and this understanding of it is unquestionably the true one), then is slavery as properly the subject of present regulation as of future force and may be restrained in its future increase in just consistency with an admitted and fundamental principle in every government.

After this argument it may be unnecessary to say, that there is in my judgement nothing wrong in the *post nati* or after-born principle which has been presented on this subject, by the gentleman (Mr. Randolph) from Albemarle. I decline, however, expressing any opinion, none being called for, as to the terms or manner in which he proposes to carry that principle into effect.

A contemplation of this subject, Mr. Speaker, has led to much remark on the dangers of slavery; they, danger and slavery, are, in truth, inseparable—the concomitants of each other under all circumstances, and are peculiarly associated under those in which it is hereafter to be tolerated in Virginia. But gentlemen assure us that this danger is far, far off. I ask them to say when they will consider it as existing? Will they understand it to exist some forty years hence, 3 18 when, according to the statistics of the gentleman from Dinwiddie (Gen. Brodnax,) the slave population, all other things remaining as they now are, will exceed that of the white man in this State by some two hundred or more thousand? No sir, not then, for this numerical majority will weigh nothing against the

## Library of Congress

intelligence and resources and military skill by which, in any struggle, it will be easy to overpower it. Will they understand it to exist should the negroes reach that disparity of numbers which is now exhibited in the West Indies and exceed their masters by some thirteen or fourteen to one? No sir, not yet, for here is a practical example that in despite of such odds, their masters, and effeminate masters too, can keep them in subjection. Sir, that disproportion may rise up to five hundred to one against the white man and we shall still find some one gallant enough to deny that danger has yet come; some one gallant enough to declare, as we well wot that *some one* has already declared it, that he could cope with that number himself—that mounted on his chosen steed, his pale horse, and having, it may be, the additional advantage of a personal resemblance to the great enemy of us all, he could drive them before him as he pleased.

Depend upon it, sir, the time will never come when interest or incredulity will not fabricate some pretext for saying and believing that the “woe is not yet.” Avarice, blindly adhering to an exclusive interest, will see no danger so great as the danger of losing its victim and will part with that only when every thing else is to be surrendered; when time himself shall close up his volume; the day of doom be ushered in;

“When earth's cities have no sound nor tread, And ships are drifting with the dead, To shores where all is dumb.”

It is not for us, however, who are the constituted guardians of the safety and happiness of the people to compromise with a danger which we know to exist—which we know to be spreading—which we know to be portentous of disaster; it is not for us to compromise with it because it proceeds from objects of profit and to argue and to doubt about acting on it until the necessity for acting be announced to us, in conflagration and murder. A necessity for acting, short of this indeed, but nevertheless, a necessity exists now, unless we are prepared to surrender every hope of legislative remedy and patiently commit ourselves to the issues of convulsion. We must begin or take the alternative; the choice is between them.

## Library of Congress

We have been told in the course of this debate, frequently told, that the attachment of the slave to his owner is common, that, in numerous instances, it is warm and devoted, and the fact has been urged in reprehension of the idea that he cared for his freedom. The fact is undoubtedly true and it is one of honorable import to the humanity of our people. But although true it is only so in particular instances; the instances themselves are anomalous; they are out of the ordinary course of human nature; are in contradiction of its strongest passions; its leading principles and are chiefly noticeable for their novelty. Were we to assume isolated instances of this kind as instances upon<sup>1</sup> 19 which it would be just to construct a system of laws for the government and condition of the slave, our legislation would be a nullity; it would provide for the units of that population but let the mass of it escape. If, however, the fact in this case, be broad as it has been stated, and the inference from it—that freedom is no boon which is desired by the slave—be just, why, then, censure our debates upon this subject? Why censure us for holding out to the slave an unattainable object, for exciting impracticable hopes, for stimulating daring and incendiary attempts to accomplish them? One or the other of these judgements upon the temper and the wishes of the slave must be mistaken; being contrary they cannot both be true, but as both have furnished a separate ground of argument against us, from one at least, of these arguments we should be held as fairly discharged.

As to the idea that the slave, in any considerable number of cases, can be so attached to his master and his servitude as to be indifferent to freedom, it is wholly unnatural—rejected by the conscious testimony of every man's heart and by the written testimony of the world's experience. The truth is, sir, that although there are special instances of slaves who are willing to forego the benefits of *complete* freedom for certain other benefits which they enjoy under a *nominal* slavery, yet the instances, from their very nature, must be limited—they can extend only to a favored few and they furnish no authority for a decision upon the conduct of others. Take the slave in his general relation to ourselves, and you cannot regard him otherwise than as man,—having the capacities and resentments of man, both indeed repressed but both existing. Here, at least, in our country, he is not

## Library of Congress

spurned from this distinction: humanity admits him as a member—soiled in his character and degraded in his fortunes, indeed, yet still a member of a common race and still entitled, as such, to our sympathy and kindness. This sentiment tells upon his condition here: you read it in his dwelling, you read it in his health, you read it in the quantum of his labor—in the manifold personal privileges which he enjoys. It is true, sir, to the letter, what gentlemen have frequently declared, that there is no laboring peasantry in any other part of the world, who, in all external respects, are better situated than our slave—who suffer less from want—who suffer less from hardship—who struggle less under the toils of life or who have a fuller supply of the comforts which mere physical nature demands. In all these respects he shares in the equalizing and benignant spirit of our institutions and our age. He is not the victim of cruelty—rarely, if ever, of oppression—is governed by an authority, which year after year, is abating of its harshness and is admitted to every privilege which the deprivation of his liberty can allow.

But, sir, it is in this very circumstance, in this alleviated and improved condition, that we have a principal cause of apprehension from the slave. You raise his intelligence with his condition, and as he better understands his position in the world, he were not man if it did not the more inflame his discontent. That it has this effect we all know; for the truth is proverbial, that a slave is the more unhappy as he is the more indulged. He could not be otherwise; he follows but the impulse of human nature in being so. Introduce him step after step into the enjoyments of that estate from which he has fallen and yet proclaim to him that he is never to regain it and his heart rejects every favour but the favour which is denied. As you benefit his external condition, then, you do not better him as a slave, but, with feelings of increased discontent, you improve his intellect, and thereby, increase both his disposition and his capacity for the purposes of resentment. Depend upon it, sir, that he will use his capacity for such purposes—that the state of things which we boast of as the evidence of our humanity is not the state of things to be trusted in.

Let gentlemen look to the clothed and comforted and privileged condition of their slaves, and please themselves with it as an achievement of kindness,—but see to it, sir, if it be

## Library of Congress

not a mask of mischief—a covering which hides from the eye the fire of a future explosion. —Lift up the condition of the slave and you bring him in nearer contact with the liberty he has lost; you deepen upon his heart,—irrevocably deepen—the image of that idol of which man is every where the worshipper. And is this safe? Or think you that no such consequence occurs—that the slave, crawling in the dust, has none of the generous feelings of a man—regards not and worships not the liberty which stirs the blood and wakens up the enthusiasm of the free? It might indeed be so, had not the love of liberty come to us with life and made up a part of its charter. Sir, you may place the slave where you please—you may dry up, to your uttermost, the fountains of his feeling, the springs of his thought—you may close upon his mind every avenue of knowledge and cloud it over with artificial night—you may yoke him to your labors as the ox which liveth only to work and worketh only to live—you may put him under any process which, without destroying his value as a slave, will debase and crush him as a rational being—you may do this and the idea that he was born to be free will survive it all. It is allied to his hope of immortality—it is the ethereal part of his nature which oppression cannot reach; it is a torch lit up in his soul by the hand of the Deity and never meant to be extinguished by the hand of man.

It is quaintly remarked by Lord Bacon that “liberty is a spark which flieth into the face of him who attempteth to trample it under foot.” And, sir, of all conceivable or possible situations, that which the slave now occupies in the domestic services of our families, is precisely the one which clothes this irrepressible principle of his nature with the fearfulest power—precisely the one which may give that principle its most fatal energy and direction. Who that looks upon his family with the slave in its bosom, ministering to its wants, but knows and feels that this is true—who but sees and knows how much the safety of that family depends upon forbearance, how little can be provided by defence? Sir, you may exhaust yourself upon schemes of domestic defence, and when you have examined every project which the mind can suggest, you will, at last, have only a deeper consciousness that nothing can be done. No sir, nothing, for this purpose, can be done. The curse which in combination with others, has been denounced against man as a just punishment for his

## Library of Congress

sins—the curse of having an enemy in his household—has come upon us. We have an enemy there to whom our dwelling is at all times accessible—our persons 21 at all times—our lives at all times and that by manifold weapons, both visible and concealed.

But, sir, I will not expatiate farther on this view of the subject. Suffice it to say that the defenceless situation of the master and the sense of injured right in the slave are the best possible preparatives for conflict; a conflict too, which may be considered as more certainly at hand whenever and wherever the numerical ascendancy of the slave shall inspire him with confidence in his force.

We are called upon, then, sir, by every motive which can impel or authorise us to act, by considerations individual and general, considerations of safety to our families, and of prosperity to the Commonwealth—to provide against the growing dangers of our slave population—to provide for a limitation on its increase—to provide for the interception of its innumerable evils before they be visited, on the slave or his owner, or on both, in irreparable calamity.

Let us, Mr. Speaker, examine for a moment our relations with the Federal Government and see whether they are not such as to afford an auxiliary argument for the policy which I have been endeavoring, on other grounds, to establish. This view was glanced at, upon yesterday, by my friend—(Mr. Randolph,) from Albemarle. I beg leave to expand it a little.

I will not enlarge upon the fact, that the existence of slavery creates a political interest in this Union, which is of all others, the most positive; an interest, which in relation to those who do not possess it, is adversary and exclusive; one which marks the manners of our country by a correspondent distinction and is sowing broadcast amongst us, both in our official and private intercourse, the seeds of unkindness and suspicion. On this interest geographical parties have been formed—on its maintenance or restriction, the bitterest struggles have been waged in another body, (Congress,) and as it contains an ingredient of political power in our Federal Councils, it will always be the subject of struggle—always

## Library of Congress

defended by the most vigilant care and assailed by the most subtle counteraction. Slaveholding and non-slaveholding must necessarily constitute the characteristic feature of our country—must necessarily form the broad and indivisible interest upon which parties will combine, and will and does comprehend in the jealousies which now surround it, the smothered and powerful, but, I trust, not the irresistible causes of future dismemberment. To all of its other evils then, slavery superadds the still further one, of being a cause of National dissention—of being a fixed and repulsive element between the different members of our Republic—itself impelling with strong tendency and aggravating all smaller tendencies to political distrust, alienation and hostility.

Should the dismemberment of our Union ever occur from this or other causes, let us look, for a moment, at the probable consequences which would result from it—not on the elevated ground in which these consequences might be considered as affecting the oppressed of other countries, who, directed by the light of our example, have committed themselves to a last and devoted struggle for their rights—but solely as they affect the case of slavery and the public security which that case involves. Suppose the federative tie to be broken—suppose that the Union, which in despite of occasional errors, has been a beneficial bond of political amity, should have passed away and the States which compose it be thrown into the attitude of separate and independent governments. Suppose this to be the case, and it is evident that their new relations to each other must be maintained under circumstances the most inauspicious to their peace. Whatever be the motives which cause neighboring nations to hate each other—the motives of rivalry and counteraction; those which make them hostile in interest, hostile in feeling—prone to insult and aggression and war upon each other—whatever these motives be, they would be aggravated here by the unappeasable bitterness of a family quarrel—by the vindictiveness of a ruptured brotherhood. Yes sir, these motives, thus specially inflamed, would urge on to their objects and shew themselves in instant activity at the very first moment of our Federal dissolution.

## Library of Congress

Let this dreaded event but occur—let this Union which, above every other political blessing, is worthy not only of the loyalty of our principles but the loyalty of our affections too, let it be given up, and the peace which it secures and the bountiful prosperity which our citizens have reaped under it, be handed over to separate and disunited States for their care and preservation, and what, I ask you, is to be the consequence? Are we to remain as perfectly secure and prosperous as at present—as perfectly free from danger from each other as now? No sir, that is impossible. When we part we part in anger: we shall live in anger or in jealousy with each other; hatred and revenge and suspicion and mutual scorn at mutual differences of habits and institutions will rankle in our intercourse, will interrupt our peace, will eternally keep us in the act or attitude of border hostility. The past picture of England, Scotland and Ireland, will be renewed in America, and the fell spirit of feud and foray and border war will be domesticated here. The boundary lines which now imperceptibly blend with each other, in token of our family kindness, will speedily exhibit the evidences of a family rupture—of a departed confidence—and like the frontier lines of foreign nations, will be marked by the array of military equipment and military defiance. Our new and petty principalities will put on the whole panoply of Empires—will furnish forth their armies and navies and cordons of posts and all the etcetera of a precautionary and jealous defence.

In this state of things what is to be *our* situation—how are we likely to be placed? Sir, do you not see under the event supposed, that it would be a situation of peril? Do you not see, at a glance, how enfeebled Virginia and the whole South, would become by that alien and insurrectionary population which they nurture in their bosom? Do you not see that any emergency which would concentrate their disposable force on the objects of external defence, would lay open the whole interior to devastation and would expose every family to the most unutterable of catastrophes? Nay, sir, do you not see, as a last and crowning result, that the very form and principle of our government might be lost—that no patriotism and no devotion might be able to sustain it under the double shock of servile and of foreign war, and that we—yes sir, we to whom the humbled and oppressed of the world 23 look

## Library of Congress

with hope and rejoicing of heart as being the most favored of men—might sink into the darkness and despotism, whose very horrors had long been illustrated in contrast with our happier example? If gentlemen do not see nor feel the evil of slavery whilst this Federal Union lasts, they will see and feel it when it is gone; they will see and suffer it then in a magnitude of desolating power to which the “pestilence that walketh at noon day” would be a blessing—to which the mal-aria that is now threatening extinction to the “eternal city,” as the proud one of the Pontiffs and the Cæsars is called, would be as refreshing and as balmy as the first breath of Spring to the chamber of disease.

Let it not be said, sir, that the political contingency supposed, the dismemberment of these States, is a visionary one—an improbable presumption, and of course, that is one for all the fancied and possible results of which, no legislative discretion requires us to provide. It is but too unhappily the contrary. Whether we look to matters of fact or to the results of reasoning, the event adverted to is any thing but visionary. No man who looks to the posture or prospects of our federal relations and understands the grounds on which they rest, but well knows that this very event at this very hour, is lowering over the otherwise sunny face of our national fortunes. No man, who sees at all, but must perceive the gathering auguries which premonish us of its approach. And when it does come who can tell the political coalitions which may follow it? Who can tell but that Dictatorships and Dynasties may spring up as the inevitable but monstrous product of a disorganized Confederacy?

It were vain to speculate on the possible combinations which might arise or upon the principle or the form which they might assume. In the midst of this general uncertainty, however, there is one thing which we can foresee with precision—one thing which we may be said to know. It is this, sir, *that the slave-holding interest of the country, will and can coalesce with no other interest* and must, as a consequence, be separate and hostile to all others. But, sir, it is for the very reason, that this interest, whether imbodyed in one or two distinct Confederacies, is peculiar; for the very reason that it impairs that principle of general affiliation which would unite and strengthen it with the common sympathies of

## Library of Congress

others; for the very reason that it produces, in every community that permits it, a positive impotency in its means of self-preservation:—it is for these reasons that this interest is always a dangerous one: for these reasons that a crusade, in the name of liberty but with the purpose of plunder, will be preached against the States that protect it,—that they will be held up as the common enemies of man whom it will be a duty to overthrow and justice to despoil. If such a shock, be ever meditated and attempted, I ask you, sir, would it be possible for Virginia to stand it? Would it be possible for Virginia, with her half million of slaves and with their hopes and passions wrought up to phrensy by proclamations of assistance and of freedom, to subdue their fiendish energies and, at the same time, successfully repel the more fiendish enemy that would use them? Heaven forbid that such an effort should ever be called for!

I put it, Mr. Speaker, to the candor of gentlemen to say, whether 24 any one of the States of Europe, possessing a slave population in like ratio to its total numbers with that which is now held in Virginia—whether it could have maintained itself under the last twenty years struggles upon that continent? No one can believe it possible. A State so insulated by a peculiar interest from all around it, would be the natural enemy and the natural victim of all. The hollow pretences of an assumed morality and a no less pretended sympathy for the violated rights and liberty of man would be every where proclaimed and would bring potentate after potentate in emulous competition for the glory of putting it down. The slave would be armed against the State by the base and profligate ambition of some neighboring monarch or adventurer who looked only to the spoil, and rapine and murder and conquest would be hallowed under the names and the pretexts of “freedom and justice.” If you turn to the records of history or consult the principles of our nature, both will demonstrate that some such fate under such circumstances must be inevitable. There is, then, abundant ground to conclude that no European State, as a slave-holding one, in the last twenty years of war and revolution or at any previous time upon that continent, could have maintained bet integrity: such an anomaly, when compared with surrounding governments, would not have been suffered to exist.

## Library of Congress

And the like consequences, sir, to our own State and indeed to the whole slave-holding department of the South may be expected to occur whenever our Federal bond is dissolved. Withdraw but the protecting energies of that instrument and be the new associations into which we shall be thrown what they may—whether directed by judgement or caprice—our distinct character as a slave-holding people will still be left—we shall still hold a separate and adversary interest but hold it under circumstances of aggravated evil, as the existence of it will disqualify us for defence in the very degree in which it will expose us to foreign hostility and wrong.

Under this view of the consequences of slavery, sir, we are strongly admonished to the timely and determined exercise of the legislative action upon it. The same admonition presses us from all sides. Look to the dangers of slavery as resulting from its peculiar condition and its growth or look to them as involved in the incidents which may change the political relations of the Republic and we are emphatically warned to prepare for them in time—emphatically warned, that our destiny as a people is pledged upon the wisdom and the vigor with which we arrest them.

I am turned aside at this point, Mr. Speaker, from the path of my own reflections by the course of the remarks which were submitted the other day by the gentleman from Brunswick (Mr. Shell.) I, sir, in common, I doubt not, with every member of this House and with every lover of genuine pleasantry whose good fortune it was to be here, am indebted to that gentleman, and with no hope on my part of making compensation, for an hour or two amongst the most entertained and delighted of any which I have ever spent in this body. He, sir, has entered upon our debate as the spring enters upon the seasons—storm and tempest disappearing at his approach, and gaiety and sunshine and flowers starting up around him. It was reserved for him in 25 the exercise of a wit as playful as it was pungent—as generous as it was keen, which probing fearlessly and every where, yet “carried not a heart stain away on its blade”—it was reserved for him, sir, thus exercising this rare faculty in its double character of sportiveness and strength,

## Library of Congress

to dissipate the gloom of our discussion, to soften its severer tone and restore to the House the kindness and the temper it was losing. This gentleman is blessed also in his capacities for mental amusement and illusion: his whole atmosphere is comic and he looks through it with a sunny and a laughing face upon the world, pleasing himself with its fancied images of pastime and fun and wondering that the things which are objects of farce to him should ever be objects of fear to others. There is no telling the extent, sir, to which this wild quality of the mind will not adventure; time and space are but its handmaids; substance and shadow its contributors; it seizes upon every incident of life and every object of thought and dresses them out for mimicry and for frolic. What will it not attempt? Under its impulse do we not see that Swift could caricature the day of judgement; Holbein the phantoms of the dead, and the worthy member from Brunswick, the horrors of Southampton! What more could it do?

This gentleman in the eccentric exercise of genius, whose province it is, like the sun, to gild the objects on which it falls, has so disposed of the lights of his as to provoke a laugh at the darkest scene of our history. He has worked up a portion of that scene into a comic drama, and has played it off upon this theatre, act by act, (I speak it not derisively but technically) with an overflowing "benefit," to an admiring and overflowing audience. In the course of that dramatic narrative which he was pleased to sketch for our information and amusement, the gentleman has shadowed forth himself as a hero—not of the *first magnitude*, sir—nor yet actually a hero but only— *potentially* one. He would have been one without doubt, as he says and thought, had it not been for one of those unaccountably cross accidents which will sometimes check the career of the most gallant and lay all their aspirations and hopes of laurels in the dust. A volunteer in the army of the "South-Side," he expected to distinguish himself against Gen. Nat and his band and was marching on, with the picture of his fame before him, and had reached the very point of his wishes, when to his utter disappointment, they were all dashed and ruined by "three men and two boys," who had just encountered, routed and dispersed this redoubtable General and his

## Library of Congress

troop! Was ever man so disappointed and by so sad an accident! Our sympathies, sir, cannot but mingle with his sorrows!

But, Mr. Speaker, this statement of the gentleman's has a serious bearing and has conducted to serious conclusions. It was so emphatically reiterated by that gentleman, so connected with other remarks which were intended to show the petty and contemptible character of that whole affair and thereby to deride the arguments which have assumed it as an *illustration* of the dangers of slavery, that I cannot doubt but that this statement which was made in joke was meant for history. The very same strain of derisive remark has been employed by other gentlemen in relation to this same affair and with the like bearing on this debate. I have, therefore, sought out the documentary history of the Southampton transaction, that I might understand, not only its precise extent, but also the light in which it was viewed, at the time, as affecting the general security of the surrounding country—not, sir, as affecting this security through any apprehension of immediate assault from Nat and his band, but through that *spirit of revolt which might be awakened and encouraged amongst the slaves by an actual example of insurrection*. In this point of view this occurrence has been chiefly adverted to as sustaining the State policy on the subject of slaves, which has been so strenuously resisted by the gentleman from Brunswick and by others.

The volume, sir, in which the history is to be found, consists of papers originally in the hands of the Executive, but now in possession of the House, in compliance with a call upon the Executive for that purpose. As I was not a member of the Special Committee, for whose more immediate uses the information contained in this volume was intended and who have had it in their hands, I did not procure it until last night and was then prevented, by indisposition, from making the thorough examination of it which I wished. I have made, however, a sufficient one and beg leave to submit, without regard to method, some of the facts directly and collaterally connected with Nat's insurrection.

## Library of Congress

The first public notice of this event is given by Col. Trezvant of Southampton—late a member of Congress,—who throws an open note before the whole public, proclaiming insurrection and murder. This is followed by immediate and numerous calls upon the Executive for arms and ammunition, and which calls are made by officers both civil and military.—The Mayor of Petersburg, in making one, states that he considers that town in *danger*, and asks for the means of defence.

Col. Gholson, (a member of this House from Brunswick,) communicates this Southampton occurrence in a letter to the Executive—states that as reported to him it was such as to “fill the mind with the most appalling apprehensions,” and concludes with a demand for muskets.

Gen. Eppes who had been called into service to suppress the insurgents, writes to the Governor from his head-quarters at Jerusalem in Southampton, that the inhabitants of that town were in a state of terror and alarm which could not be exceeded if the town itself were devoted to storm and pillage.

Gen. Brodnax, (member from Dinwiddie,) who had assumed the command of the whole corps engaged in this service, states in an official communication to the Governor, that many families in the counties of Southampton and Greenville had fled into Brunswick—that many others had assembled in his camp at Hicks' ford—unsheltered and destitute; the poorer ones sustained on the public rations and all in great distress. He states farther, that there was no reason to believe that any general conspiracy had been formed, and that, in his opinion, twenty resolute men could at any time have put down Nat Turner and his band.

27

*Extract of a letter from Gen. Brodnax, dated August 27, 1831.*

## Library of Congress

"It is much to be regretted that in the general consternation which prevailed, the extent of the force which had rebelled should, so long, have continued unknown and exaggerated and the militia of the neighborhood unembodied. For there existed I apprehend no point of time in which twenty resolute men, could not, most easily had they confronted them, suppressed this insurrection.

"The consternation unfortunately was not confined to the county where the danger existed, but extended over all immediately above it. Not a white family in many neighborhoods remained at home—many went to other counties, and the rest assembled at different points in considerable numbers for mutual protection. In numerous instances, females, with their children, fled in the night with but one imperfect dress and no provisions. I found every hovel at Hicks' ford literally filled with women and children—with no way to lodge but in heaps on the floors—without an article of food or the means of procuring or cooking provisions. Other engagements of primary necessity prevented any attempt to ascertain their numbers. The charity of the few residents of the village would have been greatly inadequate to their support and many seemed willing to encounter starvation itself rather than return home unprotected and while their husbands and sons were in the field.

*Several extracts from a narrative of the insurrection, furnished the Governor, and making part of the volume laid before the House.*

"The murderers commenced their operations at Joseph Travis's, Monday, August 22d"—"proceeded to S. Francis's—a negro boy eighteen years old here joined them—went to Mrs. Turner's—murdered Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Newsom, a visiter, in their chambers—two men here joined them"—at Mrs. Whitehead's, whose family they murdered, they were joined by another—proceeded thence to Trajan Doyle's—killed and mangled him, &c.—at Porter's they were joined by several slaves—at Nathaniel Francis' they recruited several others. Near Mr. J. Parker's these wretches were overtaken by a small party of gentlemen who pursued them—" they were shot at and a little engagement ensued—but the gentlemen were compelled to give ground (being few in number) until

## Library of Congress

reinforced, when the negroes in turn were compelled to retreat.” “The negroes were so squandered in this engagement and retreat and so hotly pursued, that their murderous career was arrested. There was no other engagement on Monday. On Tuesday the pursuit was renewed—several were killed, and on Wednesday, as their panic increased, several others were taken without offering resistance.”

W. O. Goode and E. B. Hicks on the part of a “Committee of Safety” in the county of Mecklenburg address a letter to the Governor from which the following are extracts:

“These tidings (the account of the Southampton insurrection) found us destitute of arms on which we can rely—and when we take into consideration that the population of this county is made up of about twelve thousand blacks to about eight thousand whites; and more especially when we reflect that a large portion of the blacks are situated on the river Roanoke, sufficiently contiguous to assemble in bodies of four or five hundred in a few hours, the conclusion is forced upon us, as we trust it will be on your Excellency that our situation is critical if not perilous.”

“Properly armed, we have entire confidence in our ability to defend ourselves, as well as to give aid to other places which may be threatened.”

“Up to this time, (August 25,) there has been no insurrectionary movement in this county, but we cannot expect forbearance if the insurgents below us are not speedily quelled. We consider that less time will be lost by your Excellency's pressing, or otherwise procuring wagons to transport the arms hither.”

*Extracts from a letter addressed to Gen. Jackson, by a Committee of the citizens of Southampton, on August 29 th, 1831.*

“Most of the havoc has been confined to a limited section of our country, but so inhuman has been the butchery, so indiscriminate the carnage, that the tomahawk and scalping knife have now no terrors. Along the road travelled by our rebellious blacks, comprising a

## Library of Congress

distance of something like twenty miles, no white soul now lives to tell how fiend like was their purpose. In the bosom of almost every family this enemy still exists. Our homes, as well those near the scene of havoc as others more remote, have all been deserted and our families gathered together and guarded at public places in the country;" and "still farther the excitement is so great, &c. &c., that were the justices to pronounce a slave innocent, we fear a mob would be the consequence." This committee therefore ask for a detachment of the United States troops as a guard. This application, remitted to the President, was enclosed by the Secretary of War to the Governor who, in his reply, very properly repels the idea that the State could not defend its citizens.

Sept. 19th, 1831. Judge Semple thus writes to the Governor, nearly a month after the insurrection:

28

"The people here are in a state of great excitement and the town is one entire camp."

In an official despatch from General Eppes at Jerusalem, of date the 31st August, 1831, we have the following: Speaking of the apprehensions of the negroes themselves, he says—"Coupled with the violence done upon some in this neighborhood who have been shot at sight, even without knowing who they were, it does not seem to me remarkable that they should be under apprehensions." Speaking farther of a case in a neighboring county, in which "a negro had been examined, discharged, and afterwards shot down," he states, "I put an end to this inhuman butchery in two days, dispersed the troops from where they were assembled; the citizens retired and I have not heard of an act of violence since, except upon the rebels in arms who refused to surrender."

But, Mr. Speaker, I forbear further reference to this volume which, is literally, a volume of terror. Huge as it is, it is filled with communications of distress or alarm, and with requests for arms from the citizens and officers of some thirty or more counties of the State.

## Library of Congress

From these and like extracts, which might easily be multiplied, it appears, generally, sir, that to its extent, there never was a bloodier or more shocking massacre than that of Southampton, that besides the sixty-two or sixty-three white persons who were murdered and the forty odd insurgents who were shot in arms or executed afterwards, there were others (how many is not known) who were shot privily (and by whom, I believe is not known) without accusation or trial;—that many died in the field refusing to surrender; that a detachment only of these wretches attacked Dr. Blount's house and were repelled by the “three men and two boys” spoken of; that the insurgents, *recruited others at every house to which they went*, with but few exceptions, and that before they were checked, they had traversed the country a distance of twenty miles spreading desolation and woe around them. It also appears that it was early believed and early made known to the governor and the public as the opinion of the commanding general (General Brodnax,) that there was no general conspiracy and that Nat and his whole force might at any time have been put down by twenty resolute men. And yet sir, notwithstanding this statement such was the general consternation produced by this event and such the conscious insecurity of every neighborhood and family that rapid and vigorous preparations were almost every where making for military defence. Companies were organized—concerts established—military supplies provided—towns and counties far from the place of revolt—far from one another—many of them days and weeks after the revolt had been crushed, were still anxiously calling on the Executive for arms, arms.

Now sir, I ask you, I ask gentlemen, in conscience to say, was this a “petty affair?” I ask you, whether that was a petty affair which startled the feelings of your whole population,—which threw a portion of it into alarm—a portion of it into panic; which wrung out from an affrighted people the thrilling cry, day after day conveyed to your Executive, “we are in peril of our lives, send us arms for defence.” Was that a “petty affair” which drove families from their homes, which assembled women and children in crowds and without shelter at places of common refuge, in every condition of weakness and infirmity, under every suffering which want and pain and terror could inflict, yet willing to endure all—willing to meet death

## Library of Congress

from famine, death from the climate, death from hardships, any thing rather than risk the horrors of meeting it from a domestic assassin? Was that a “petty 29 affair” which erected a peaceful and confiding portion of the State into a military camp, which outlawed from pity the unfortunate beings whose brothers had offended, which barred every door, penetrated every bosom with fear or suspicion, which so banished the sense of security from every man's dwelling that let a hoof or a horn but break upon the silence of night and an aching throb would be driven to the heart; the husband would look to his weapon and the mother would shudder and weep upon her cradle!

Was it the fear of Nat Turner and his deluded and drunken handful of followers which produced or could produce such effects? Was it this that induced distant counties where the very name of Southampton was strange, to arm and equip for a struggle? No sir, it was the suspicion eternally attached to the slave himself, the suspicion that a Nat Turner might be in every family, that the same bloody deed could be acted over at any time and in any place, that the materials for it were spread through the land and always ready for a like explosion. Nothing but the force of this withering apprehension, nothing but the paralyzing and deadening weight with which it falls upon and prostrates the heart of every man who has helpless dependants to protect, nothing but this could have thrown a brave people into consternation, or could have made any portion of this powerful Commonwealth, for a single instant, to have quailed and trembled.

This Commonwealth in the late war stood the shock of England's power and the skill of England's veterans with scarce a moment of public disquiet. Admiral Cockburn with his incendiary spirit and backed by his incendiary myrmidons alarmed not the State; struck no fear into its private families, and had his spirit been ten fold more savage than it was and his army an hundred fold stronger and had he plied every energy and pledged every faculty of his soul to the destruction of the State, he could not have produced one moment of that terror for private security which seizes upon all at the Cry of insurrection. He would have been our enemy in the field, would have warred in open combat with the disciplined and the gallant of the land. But an insurgent enemy wars at the fireside—makes his battle

## Library of Congress

ground in the chamber and seeks, at the hours of repose, for the life of the slumbering and the helpless. No wonder sir, that the gentleman from Brunswick (Mr. Gholson,) with his sensibilities aroused by the acts and the fell energies of such an enemy as this should have said that “they filled the mind with the most appalling apprehensions.” No wonder that the gentleman from Mecklenburg (Mr. Goode) looking to the same desolating power of this domestic enemy and feeling that the numerical excess of the slave in the county he represents made its exercise the more easy and the more to be dreaded—no wonder he should say, that he considered his “situation not only critical but perilous.”

Sir, I thank that gentleman for this declaration:—I thank him for having compressed into so short a statement the very truth which I had been endeavoring to establish by argument, and for having lent his testimony, however unwittingly, but the more valuable as rendered under a practical view of the question, to that very policy which I have been laboring to recommend—he laboring to prevent. Were I to retrace my argument on the subject under debate, with the view of amending it, I could not place it more broadly or more favorably before you, than it is placed by the gentleman himself in the passage of his letter alluded to.

What was the general argument? It was that the confinement (now inevitable from the laws existing or expected of other States) of the present race of slaves, together with their increase to the limits of Virginia must soon result in giving to them a numerical superiority—that this superiority, when attained would and must lead to inevitable danger to the public safety, and, therefore, that such result should be provided against and prevented in season. What, now, is the gentleman's statement? It is, that there are twelve slaves to eight white persons in the county of Mecklenburg, and that he considers this circumstance, together with another of incidental influence, which he mentions, as well calculated to render the situation of that county not only “critical, but perilous.” Where is the difference between the result argued *to* upon principle and the *result* announced upon fact? There is none earthly. The dangers of the slave population mainly arise upon its excess over the white population. So says the argument, and so says the gentleman's statement.

## Library of Congress

This statement, therefore I adopt, as containing the substantial truth which I desired to exhibit, but I adopt it on condition, that I be allowed to append to it a single corollary—a just, natural and legitimate one—It is this; that as the danger to the white population is “perilous” when the black population is greatest, according to the gentleman's confession, that, *therefore*, this gentleman himself should unite in arresting the “peril” of which he complains, by restraining the black population from exceeding the white. This is the policy vindicated by my argument—the policy required by his fact. Consistency, should make the same application of both.

It may be added sir, that what is true of Mecklenburg, with her greater slave than white population would be still more so of the whole State under like circumstances. As the whites outnumbered the blacks in the aggregate population of the whole State, the danger to particular districts where the contrary is the case, can be alleviated, but if in the total number the deficiency was on the side of the whites, then the danger would be without alleviation or corrective.

Here sir, I may be permitted to remark that as an air of ridicule has been thrown over the whole Southampton occurrence, it may be thought that the military preparations which were made by the Executive to repress it, were unnecessary and unwise. Such an inference, though I am well assured it was not intended to be covered under the remarks of the gentleman from Brunswick (Mr. Shell) may be deduced by others. Now sir, without specification of reasons on this point, it may be enough to say, that there is no one who understands aright the ground occupied by the Executive, but will authenticate the opinion, that the military provision which was made for the Southampton affair was no greater than called for and that it was ordered judiciously and effectively.

A word or two, sir, as to what is rather technically termed by gentlemen, the “jurisdiction” of this matter. The title by which the representatives 31 of the West claim to participate in the exercise of this jurisdiction has already been exhibited so ably and justly, that little more is needed for its vindication. As one of the representatives from that portion of the State

## Library of Congress

and one too, whose feelings, for years, have been deeply and irrevocably pledged to some measure of emancipation, I was nevertheless disposed from the beginning, upon views both of courtesy and expediency, to yield the principal direction of such a measure, should such be introduced, to any Eastern gentlemen who held, in relation to it, the same ulterior objects with myself. So disposed, I so stated to the Chairman of the Special Committee on the colored population (Gen. Brodnax) amongst others, and forebore, in consequence, any active connection with the subject until the motion was made by the gentleman from Mecklenburg (Mr. Goode) to discharge that committee and this House from the farther consideration of it and thus to seal it up forever.

The existing property in the slave is so preponderant on this side of the Blue Ridge, and there are so many considerations both of safety and prejudice connected with every public measure that affects it, and these are so much better understood by the representatives who sympathise with and feel them, than by others, that in my judgement, it was never more becoming or necessary that the Western members should relinquish a portion of their strict claims to reasons of prudence and should concede to those of the East, in organizing some scheme of emancipation, every thing which did not postpone or destroy its ultimate efficiency. The subject itself they could not abandon without abandoning their constituents, but the time and mode of action, if neither too indefinite nor too feeble, they could yield to be governed by the interest and discretion of others. So deeming of this matter, the Western delegates have abstained from any prominence in it until longer abstinence was rendered impossible by the effort alluded to, the effort to foreclose and, in effect, to prohibit all future legislation upon it.

Why, it is asked, should the West, with her inferior slave population, be so much more strenuous than the East for a limitation upon its increase—why abjure so vehemently a property of which she holds so little? Sir, it is for this very reason that her relative interest in it is small that the West urge the policy of preventing its growth. We do not wish that interest to become larger—we do not wish it to become more unmanageable—we do not wish it to extend beyond the convenient reach of legislative remedy—we do not wish it

## Library of Congress

to overspread that part of your State also—thus making it more and more inaccessible, and rendering its eradication, in any other mode than that of the sword, utterly and forever hopeless.

Were this question of emancipation to be sectionally considered in reference to its present practicability in the West, no one could doubt for a moment, but that it is easily and perfectly practicable there—that it would encounter little or no resistance from public sentiment and would result in no considerable shock to the productive industry of the country.

But, sir, we are told by the gentleman from Brunswick (Mr. Shell) that if the extension of slavery in the West is so intolerable to us, that we cannot any longer allow it, that in that case nothing can be easier <sup>32</sup> than to prevent it—that all we have to do is merely *not* to buy and the object is at once accomplished—the evil at once arrested. That this expedient may lack nothing of entire and perfect efficiency, he undertakes to guarantee, on behalf of the Eastern owners, that not a head shall show itself beyond the mountains unless it has been bought and bought at a sound price. This will certainly do as far as it goes but it scarcely goes the length of a single step.

What, let me ask that gentleman, would he do with the slaves who are now there—amounting to near sixty thousand, and being about double the number possessed in any of the Northern or Middle States at the era of their emancipating laws—what would he do with them and their increase? Would their growth be limited by a refusal to purchase others? It may be so, but it will certainly require the gentleman's ingenuity to explain the process by which it is done. Besides this, does it not occur to this gentleman that his recipe for the cessation of Western slavery,—and which, by the way, is compounded of quite as much voluntary abstinence as is like to make it practicable—does it not occur to him that it operates but partially? That whilst it *prohibits* a Western man from importing a negro to his own domain it *permits* an Eastern one to cover it over with as many as he pleases? Are not your Western lands to become the residence of your Eastern citizens,

and when do they move without a retinue of slaves? That this is to be the case is proven by the experience of every year and every future year will multiply the proofs and causes for this kind of emigration. When the laws of the Western States shall exclude the slave and the alternative to a lowland Virginian, whose wants have outnumbered his supplies, be the *alternative* of an unhealthy residence in the South or of a healthy one in the rich mountain districts or your own State, then will Western Virginia receive from you her part of those contributions which you are annually making to the population of other communities. This is now the case, to much extent, in some of the counties at the Western foot of the Blue Ridge, the county of Botetourt, for example, where there is a large and augmenting slave-holding interest, principally in the hands of gentlemen from Eastern Virginia. Here then is an inlet to the slave which is unprovided for by the Brunswick prescription.

But there is yet another, sir, which I hope the gentleman in the heyday and generosity of his youth will not have the heart to forbid. Would the gentleman regulate the *loves* of the country by its geography? Would he deny us the honor of a family alliance? Surely not. These alliances are not so common as to threaten the loss of *caste* to either side of the mountain, yet they will sometimes occur. It is true that the West is occasionally considered a *terra incognita* of refinement and its young men are apt to be rated as contraband articles in treaties of marriage. But it does not all do: they will some times succeed. Father and mother may sneer or may scold but love will do what it lists and despite of their frostiness, despite of their lowering, the daughter, in the innocence of her hopes will sometimes—she cannot help it—look with an eye of more favor on the Buckskin of the Mountain than on the Crab of the Lowlands. But the “beauty and the booty” are won together: the lover gets the bride, and the West gets the slave.

33

Turning, sir, to the graver aspect of our subject, from which this slight departure is relief, allow me to say, that in whatever degree the problem of emancipation in Eastern Virginia has assumed an appalling character and now presses upon the mind with a painful and

## Library of Congress

distressing sense of its almost incalculable magnitude and difficulty, in that very degree does the reason exist why you should arrest the progress of slavery now—why you should not suffer it to go forward. Sir, you have yet one safe and rallying point in the West where you may operate for the extinction of this curse. If that too be occupied by the slave as the plains of the East are occupied, all hope but the hope of the strongest is gone, and you must look for your destiny in the issues of mutual and horrible concussion. Let that dry spot be preserved—let it not be covered by this spreading inundation and relief is yet practicable—a door of escape is yet open, but if that last place of refuge be relinquished, you may save *yourselves* but you will rear your posterity to the scenes of the dagger and the torch.

As a Virginian then no less than as a Western man I would implore this Assembly to begin the work of safety and protection now. A definitive and positive law is not sought for—only let the object be resolved upon, only let the “expediency” of it be established by your decision and you will, for the present, have made progress enough—you will have laid the corner stone on which the better fortunes of your country may be built.

LC 54 W